By the autumn of 1916 a considerable number of vessels on the more dangerous routes had been supplied with guns.

Slow progress

™% cvidmg On ist January, 1917, only 1,337 of our merchantmen carried guns, The Official History records that "During the campaign of 1915, no merchant ships with a defensive armament had been sunk by German submarines ; and, up to August, 1916, the number destroyed, though steady, was quite small. " In the summer of 1916 the Germans began launching their big sub-marines. In the autumn of the year, figures showed that the U-boat commanders were beginning to over-come the difficulties they experienced in attacking armed merchant vessels : " Twelve defensively armed merchantmen were sunk in December,

Diminishing

j^g and in January, 1917, the number

Imall guns

^a<^ r*sen to twentY- **It** was true ^at of the merchantmen which escaped, nine out of ten did so by virtue of their gunfire. . . ."

In the autumn of 1916 the position was that defensive arming of merchantmen had proved itself very useful against gunfire attacks by the older U-boats. The big submarines, however, which the Germans were now beginning to use could outrange the little guns hitherto supplied to merchant ships. And far too few of our ships were carrying any arma-ment at all.

In the spring of 1916 there had been some slight risk of trouble with America over the arming of

President

merchantmen. On January i8th, Presi-

Wilson objects dent Wilson, with the best of intentions
to arming of for mitigating the horrors of submarine
merchantmen igsued Qne of hig
proposing to bring this form of war "
within the rules